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Grand Staircase, Utah

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Grand Staircase, Utah

Erik Nielsen

My mother held my hand as we walked.
The three of us alone on a dark road,
And though it was summer in the south
we were cold with sweat and shivered.
Lost on this red dirt road,
the fading purple sky of dusk
seemed frightening.
The frozen stars
shimmered with such intensity.

When my dad jumped into that pickup,
after waving it down,
he pretended to be calm,
and I remember thinking
I would never see him again.

I offered my mother Corn Nuts from my pocket
And I could tell she wanted to cry,
Not in sorrow, but in awe of my generosity.
My innocent gift a threat to her motherhood.

Later, when my father's Volkswagon van whined into sight
and illuminated our shadows,
making that wilderness seem so fluorescent and fake,
we cheered
and gulped great gulps of water
before bumping down the road to our camp and tents.

We had hiked for hours in sand and sage,
and my father felt like he'd failed us.
He has, in fact, since asked for forgiveness.
But to a boy he was heroic,
legs dangling over a rusted truck bed,
disappearing in the dark,
rolling over the rise,
unknown and full of red dust.



To me, it seemed so easy being lost.
Safe and sleeping that night,
I couldn't wait to be lost with them again—
to give all we had together
in such selfless moments.